

ADF MENTAL HEALTH & WELLBEING

SLEEPING SOUNDLY



JOINT HEALTH COMMAND
VICE CHIEF OF THE DEFENCE FORCE



What is good sleep?

You know you are having good quality sleep when you wake feeling refreshed, alert and energised. A person with a sleep disorder usually reports sleeping poorly or not enough. While sleep needs vary between individuals, most people need about 6 to 8 hours of good quality sleep per day. Individuals cycle through various stages of sleep throughout the night with a complete cycle taking approximately 90 minutes. Waking part way through a cycle either during the night or in the morning can leave you feeling groggy and lethargic.

Why is sleep important?

Sleep is necessary to sustain good health and wellbeing. It provides the mind and body with the opportunity to restore balance and repair itself. While we sleep, the immune system works to manufacture the necessary cells to fight off infection and disease, the pituitary gland produces growth hormones that help to repair tissues, and the overall chemical balance in the body is restored. At the same time, the mind is working to organise and store memories from the day's activities. A person suffering from sleep-deprivation can often feel lethargic, have trouble concentrating, and may therefore be at greater risk of having accidents.

How do sleep problems affect you?

Sleep deprivation over time is associated with:

- concentration problems, impaired judgement, difficulty making decisions
- reduced ability to deal with stress
- mood swings and irritability
- emotional problems such as depression and anxiety
- more susceptibility to illness
- increased risk of accidents
- aging more rapidly
- increased risk of general health concerns such as heart disease, diabetes, increased blood pressure
- apathy, low energy, fatigue
- headache
- general feeling of malaise or sickness
- weight gain.

Impact for the military

Sustained military operations often demand high level cognitive functioning, wakefulness, and vigilance over a prolonged period of time.

In times of emergency or acute operations, individuals may get no sleep at all (total sleep deprivation). At other times, members may suffer partial sleep deprivation, where their sleep cycle is interrupted one or more times. Further, military members routinely work rotating shifts and serial night shifts, exposing them further to the potential effects of sleep deprivation.

Mistakes caused by fatigue can occur as early as the second night of lost sleep. Studies of military personnel report one night of sleep deprivation can decrease cognitive performance by 30 to 40%, while two nights of deprivation can result in a decline in performance as high as 60 to 70%.

The ability to complete complex tasks is affected first. Unfortunately, those who need to make complex tactical decisions are also those people who are the least likely to get adequate sleep in combat situations.

Common treatments for sleep disorders

Treatments for sleep disorders vary depending on the specific condition identified. The form of treatment chosen also needs to take into account all of the factors that may be influencing the quality and quantity of your sleep on a daily basis.

Treatment options include cognitive or behavioural treatments (such as stress management and relaxation strategies), medication or a combination of these approaches.

It is important that you discuss your concerns regarding your sleep patterns with your treating Medical Officer or Mental Health Professional to confirm whether you have a sleep disorder and, if so, the type of treatment approach best suited to addressing the problem.

Do you have a sleep problem?

If sleep problems persist for a month or more you may need to consult your doctor for further assessment. Not being able to fall asleep when you go to bed, waking in the middle of the night, waking too early in the morning, not being able to get back to sleep, and waking feeling unrefreshed, can be indicators of a sleep disorder. In fact, even if the problem is temporary you should evaluate those factors that may be affecting you. Poor quality sleep is a concern no matter its cause or duration.

Common causes of sleep problems

- emotional upset (including depression, anxiety and stress)
- alcohol. While it may help you to get to sleep initially, it will disrupt your sleep cycles resulting in poor quality sleep
- stimulants including caffeine and nicotine. Try to have your last source of caffeine and/or cigarette 4 to 6 hours before your anticipated bedtime
- eating a large meal close to bed time stimulates the digestive system when it should be 'shutting down' for the day. Try to leave at least 2 hours between your evening meal and going to bed
- exercising too close to bed time stimulates your system by boosting your metabolism and the effect can linger for hours afterwards
- bedroom environment is not conducive to good sleep patterns (too hot, too cold, and too noisy)
- snoring (if concerned about this see your Medical Officer)
- medications including diet pills, some blood pressure, allergy or asthma medications
- chronic pain
- poor sleep/bedroom habits. Only use your bed for sleep and sex. Do not use your bedroom as an office or watch TV in bed
- a new baby typically results in over 400 hours of lost sleep for parents in the first year.

Getting better sleep – ways to improve your sleep that you can start today!

- Manage your stress. Learn to relax. Effective stress management strategies include imagery, deep breathing, progressive muscle relaxation, and relaxation exercises. These exercises will not take away your worries, but they should help you to relax sufficiently so that you are able to fall asleep, be more refreshed in the morning and be better equipped to cope with your concerns.
- Darkness. Sleeping in near or total darkness, if possible, is recognised as most conducive to good sleep patterns.
- Set the mood. Ensure the sleeping environment is comfortable and relaxing. A good quality mattress and pillow with comfortable bedding will go a long way towards helping you get a good night's sleep.
- Develop a bedtime routine. Create rituals that help you to wind down from the day's activities and prepare yourself physically and mentally for sleep. Your brain needs at least 30 minutes to wind down enough to begin to be receptive to the idea of sleep. Turn off the TV and stop doing anything (e.g. dishes, folding the washing, paperwork) that stimulates your brain about 30 to 60 minutes before you anticipate going to bed. Reading before bed is fine if you find it relaxing rather than stimulating.
- Establish a sleep schedule. Make sleep a priority and establish a daily schedule that allows sufficient time for you to get adequate sleep. Try and go to bed at the same time every night and wake at the same time every morning. When this is not possible, focus more on maintaining the morning wake time while keeping the evening curfew as often as possible. Set the alarm and get up at the same time each day, regardless of how much sleep you had the night before.
- If you can't get to sleep, don't continue to lie there trying hard to get to sleep. If after 15 minutes you still feel fully awake, get up and do something relaxing. When you feel sleepy, go back to bed. Repeat this process as often as necessary throughout the night.

Where to seek help

Your chain of command is a primary resource that can provide advice, referral and support. You can also contact your local on base Health Centre, Mental Health Professional, Chaplain or the Duty Officer/ Officer of the Day for immediate assistance and referrals.

The ADF Mental Health All-Hours Support Line (ASL) is a confidential telephone service for ADF members and their families available 24/7 on **1800 628 036** or if calling from overseas +61 2 9425 3878.

If you are away from base, or for out-of-hours assistance, you can call **1800 IMSICK** to locate the nearest support.

Chaplains are connected to all units in Australia and can provide support and appropriate referrals.

The ADF Health and Wellbeing Portal
www.defence.gov.au/health/healthportal/

The Portal is an online health information resource tool for all current and ex-serving ADF Members and their families.

Other Resources

Defence Family Helpline (1800 624 608)

www.defence.gov.au/dco

The Defence Family Helpline is your first point of call for support, information and connection with your community. The Helpline is available 24/7 for ADF Members and their families, and is staffed by qualified human services professionals including social workers and psychologists.

You can also email the Helpline on DefenceFamilyHelpline@defence.gov.au and receive a response within 24 hours.

Veterans and Veterans Families Counselling Service (VVCS). This 24-hour service is available to veterans of all deployments and their families on **1800 011 046**.